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"TID'APA"

GILBERT FRANKAU

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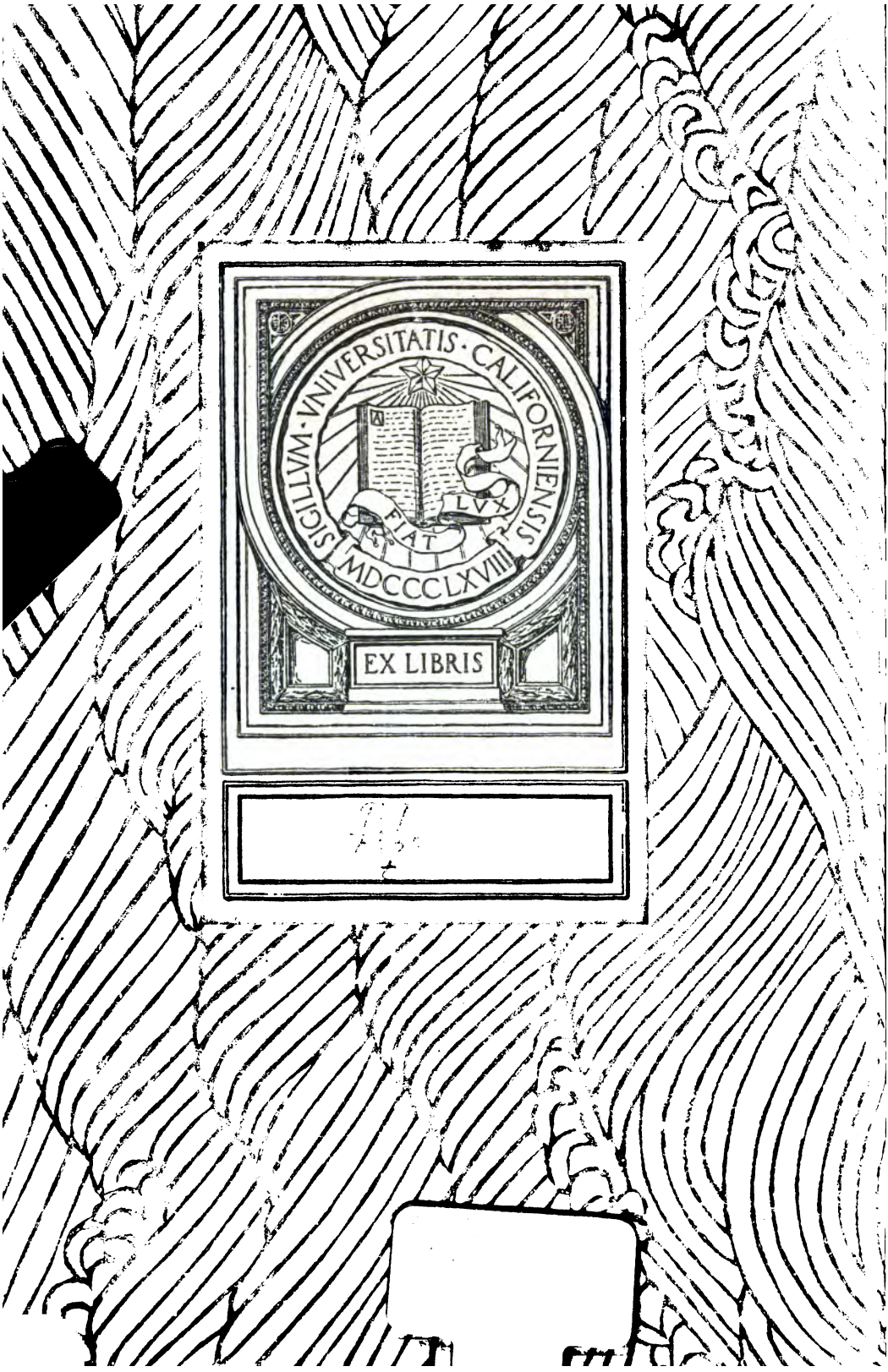
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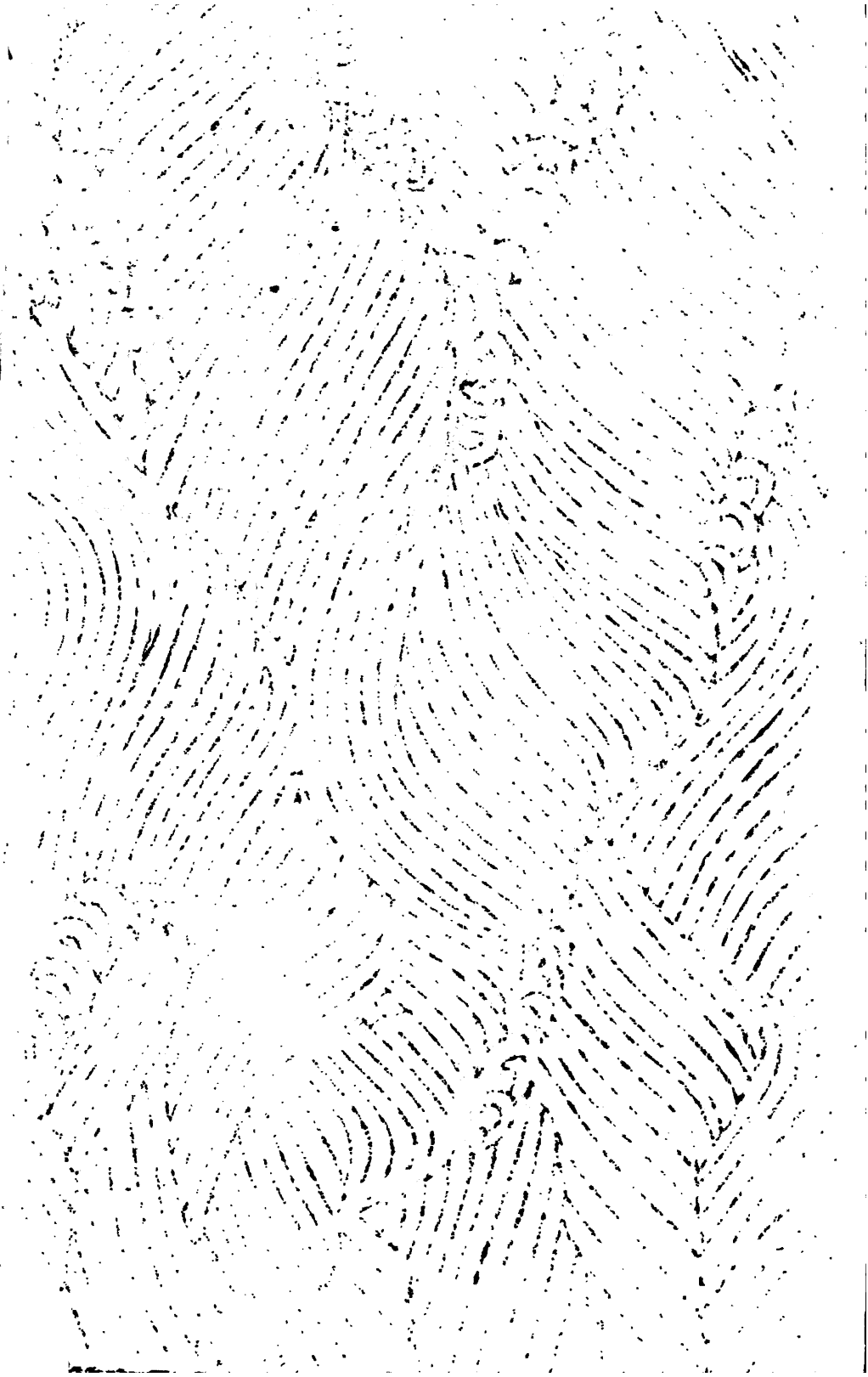

"TID'APA"

"TID'APA"

(What *Does* It Matter?)

BY

GILBERT FRANKAU

UNIV. OF
CALIFORNIA

NEW YORK
B. W. HUEBSCH
MCMXIV

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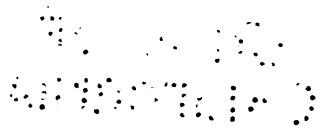
"Tid'apa"

§ I

Do you know our churchyard at Aden; lone tombs on a sun-parched plain—
Treeless, and flowerless, untended, unkissed of God's kindly rain—
Fenced square with a low, green railing, lest the jackal filch from the priest?
As you drive through Cantonment gateway, look well! It is all the East!
There's one tombstone in Aden churchyard, more lone than its lonely mates,
Whereunder—brown paper only between him and Hell's blazing gates—
Lies the body of 'John James Sanders. Commercial. Who died at sea.'
From the 'Corner House' to Malay Street, runs the trail of his memory;
From the 'Spotted Dog,' to the Yacht Club, there are stories of 'Whisky Jim'—
Men's tales of fierce sprees and deep drinking. And yet, if *they* mention him,



"Tid'apa"

The women, the loose-gowned women, foregathered at tiffin-time,
When 'The Street' shews stripped of its tinsel, like an over-painted mime
In the sickly glare of the noonday—when the beer gleams amber-gold,
And the charred butts hiss in the saucers where the coffee-dregs grow cold—
There will always be one who voices the verdict (they see so clear,
Our outcasts) *"Ach,* Whisky Jimmy, he was gentleman-born, my dear."

§ II

Like ramparts of jade, in a garden sea-circled of blues and of greens—
A garden all frangipanni, and moonflowers, and mangosteens
Wine-red under lustrous foliage where the mating parrots scream—
Due South from the Great Pagoda, four days of a favouring steam,
Rise the Ridges of Lallong Island;—jade ramparts, that beetle down
To the straight white roads, and the palm-trees, and the beaches of Lallong Town.
Life's lazy for us in Lallong: we are few, far off, on the fringe
Of the teeming Eastern markets; but ever their trades impinge
On the sunbright, seasonless sequence of our ordered, tropic days:
For, westward plying or eastward, black-funnelled, the liner stays
Her course in our red-buoyed harbour; and ever the mad-keen men,

"Tid'apa"

Released from the blackened hillsides, from the
half-cleared rubber-fen,
From the red alluvial tin-bank and the *tali-ayer's*
flow,
Drift in by the *'kreta sombong'* to drink at the
'M. & O.'
Where the white man drinks, there are women.
Desire's paid captives, they come
From the dreary Polish farm-land or the packed
Italian slum,
Weighed, chosen, and shipped like cattle, for a fate
that is no less sure,
In the lamplit passion-shambles where the white
bawd flaunts her lure.
But our prices are low in Lallong, low even for
kine as these;
Cathayan and brown Malayan and the flower-
decked Japanese
Join issue with meat-fed Europe: "Come here.
Come up here, dear," they cry
To the drunkly-waving seaman as his rickshaw-
wheels roll by.
So you'll find but love's refuse and sweepings;—
rouged cheek sliced deep where the blade
Of the husband, betrayed too often, wiped out the
charms that betrayed;

"Tid'apa"

Dull eye, red-rimmed as a vulture's with the wakeful nights and the wine;
Shrunk arm, pocked, pallid, and pitted by the needle's anodyne;—
Drink-sodden or drug-sodden, outraged, or cankered with fouller scourge,
In the white man's own 'white' houses which the white man dares not purge.

Yet when Jimmy was liquor-crazy, nor the proven risk nor the dread
Of the ten-fold deadlier peril—fears known, friends ruined, or dead—
Could hold him back from the women. And that night, ere the bar-boys slept,
He had shouted for *pahit* and for *stinger* till the hot, strong bane of them swept
In flame to each brain-cell's tinder. Flesh called, and all flesh was sweet,
As he kicked up his rickshaw-coolie, and steered him, blind, for 'The Street.'
Past the sounds, and the signs, and the singing, and the high verandah-glows,
Was it Luck, or The Larger Purpose which led him to Madame Rose?

"Tid'apa"

As the kites watch, waited *die Alte.* Thick-
lidded, her filmed eyes blinked;
She stiffened, her plumage ruffled; she was up ere
the stair-bell clinked,
"*Du Clärchen!*" she summoned. Languid, indif-
ferent, old to the game,
Raised hands smoothing tresses disordered, the
sloven Austrian came.
"Beer: lashings of beer." How it bubbled; how
the client rocked as he quaffed.
"Here's cheero, old thing," he hiccoughed; "here's
cheero." *Die Alte* laughed.
"Drunk—thirty dollars—you get it!" she whis-
pered. They were alone.
"Come 'n along," his thick voice slobbered to the
wheeze of the gramophone. . . . .
"You vill stay mit me, von't you, *liebchen?*" (Lust
jettisons love-finesse,
While the wine yet works in the wooed one.) But
ere he might answer 'Yes,'
To a patter of mounting footsteps and a mutter of
oath from Clare,
The chickstrings trembled and parted . . . and
Julie was there.
French Julie! just home from 'the pictures;' pink
chiffon scarf on her head;

"Tid'apa"

Dark eyes, bright-clear as a baby's; flushed cheeks, as a schoolgirl's, red
With the pulse of unwonted pleasure. She was pure *grisette;* yet a trace—
So soon!—of the man-made hardness was stamped on that roguish face.
The drunkard eyed her in wonder. "Lord love us, whose infant is this?
A French kid. Here? And a new one! O darling, give uncle a kiss.
What's that? *Ne comprends pas. Eh bien donc, viens ici m'embrasser, ma mie."*
(Jim's brand was a seller in Saigon.) Clare frowned, and rose from his knee.
"Nimmt doch immer die besten Kunden:" hate snarled in the guarded voice:
But the brothel-code was upon her; the law of the client's choice,
Which none may hinder nor question. She had lost. It was Julie's trick.
Her worn shoes scraped on the matting as she sulked through the rustling chick.

. . . . . .

So much more like a maid than a harlot, demure, unassuming, *petite*—

"Tid'apa"

What, what in the name of the devil, brought Julie
to Cinnabar Street?
Had he been *half*-sober, some subtle, some in-
grained instinct of right
Would have sounded its voiceless message; but the
whole mad man was alight
With the passions that drink had kindled, and
fondling fanned to a fire.
And yet, even on drink-doped senses,—dazed eyes,
beast-blank with desire,
Saw naught but a houri-vision, white arms, red lips,
and the sheen
Where the neck curved warm to the breastline,—
the aura of things unseen,
A scarce-breathed, flickering soul-wave, discoded
but conscience-deep,
Thrilled weak; as a whispered warning, half-
heard and forgotten in sleep.
So weak, yet for Julie—a respite!
A stranger's voice, through the haze,
His own voice came to him. Stumbles and dark-
ness! Sudden, the blaze
Of gas-flares! Coolth!! They were moving. It
was all just a blurred dream-ride;
Tossed loin-cloth, dipping and rising to the lope
of his coolie's stride;

"Tid'apa"

Wheels whirring; a rush of faces; and the girl he clasped; and the gleam
As the lights spun past and behind them. Gay dreams! But for her—no dream;
Those dank hands seeking her, clutching and fumbling at bosom and waist;
Those lips that mocked at her struggles, lips bitter as whisky to taste.
How she loathed these English—the drunkards!

"Do you love me?" Piteous guile,—
Her writhed mouth shrivelled in answer to the wan, dumb wraith of a smile.
"A peach—but an iced one. *Tid'apa,* he liked them cold, till. . . ." The wheels
Stopped dead. They were back at Rose's. He had climbed the stairs at her heels.

. . . . . .

Arms pressed on the sill,—deaf and blind to the eddying pageant below,—
She leaned from the open casement. Mixed octaves, the ebb and the flow
Of life in 'the lines,' beat upwards—boys shouting, a fragment of song,

"Tid'apa"

Click-scrape of dropped shafts on the sidewalk,
weird music, plunk of a gong,
Strings twanging, lewd laughter of women,

"Faut bien nous coucher, ma chère."
. . . Hardly a sound, but he heard it: *"Mon Dieu, que la vie est amère."*
And a great fear fell upon Jimmy; the scarlet of drink went gray;
For he seemed to catch, in that whisper, the cry of a soul at bay.
'There was nothing her form in Lallong . . but he wasn't going to stay—
No, not for millions of dollars. . Should he give his reasons, explain,
Console, or try to? . . Quite hopeless! What was the reason?' His brain
Refused. 'Still—he mustn't stop there. Best slip away. . .' To the creak
Of his footfall, she turned, and faced him, and knew, and ere he could speak,
—Lost clients meant fines from *die Alte,* or worse —she had clutched him, and held
Till the frayed silk ripped at his shoulder. She begged, she implored, she compelled,

She wept, she caressed, and cajoled him, clung tight as a drowning one clings:
And her words were the words of a harlot, she offered unnameable things.
The words were the words of the harlot, but the voice on her quivering lips
Was the voice of the prisoner in torment; stark fear in it, fear of the whips.
"Stop here? Yes, I'd stop, if you liked me."
"Je t'aime," she sobbed, "only—stay.
Je t'aime. See, I tell you I love you. Oh, please, please don't go away!"
Loosed hair rippled fragrance about him, he carried her down to her room:
Perched sideways, short-frocked, on the mattress, he thought her a child in the gloom.
(Pretty nurseries, aren't they? where the lizard runs on the wall,
And the rat on the worn-out matting; where the louse and the cockroach crawl;
Where the lean mosquito buzzes, and the torpid Kling boy's snore
Drones loud to the heat-waked sleeper through the fanlight over her door.)
"You can't fool me, you know, Julie. If you liked me, only a damn,

"Tid'apa"

I'd stay like a shot. Do you like me? The love
you talk of's a sham;
And you loathe me, loathe me like poison. Come,
tell me now—don't be afraid—
Would you rather I paid you, and vanished; or
paid you—and stayed?"
She looked at him, laughed, leaned forward, and
flung him his answer pat:
"I know, though I'm young to the business, men
don't treat women like that."
"All rules have exceptions, Julie; and it's nine
to four that I'm tight;
But here are your thirty dollars. Don't thank
me, kiddie. Good night."

§ III

"Tea, Master." The glued eyes opened. Ah
Wong's face grinned at him, blank,
Through the gap in the parted curtains. "Heap
late." He cursed him, and drank.
'Blind, blind to the wide.' It *was* shaky, his hand
on the dipper-bar,
As the water slopped over, gurgling, from its Ali-
baba jar.
There was work that morning—confound it—
work, letters and order-sheets:
For mails close, and firms wait indents, in spite
of Cinnabar Streets.
How the blurred keys slipped to the finger! "Ten
cases of Number Three,
"Red Seal. To be shipped twice monthly. Cash
Glasgow. Net F.O.B.
"Ten cases of Purple Capsule. . . ." To the type-
bars' rattle and tap,
The man and the woman in Jimmy fought-over
the night's mishap.

"Tid'apa"

'You ought to do something to help her,' cried the
voice of his woman-heart;
But the man-mind jeered in rejoinder, 'You fool,
she's only a tart.'
Came tiffin. His mail was finished. Legs wide on
the strutted chair,
He rested; but might not slumber: for the picture
of her, in despair,—
Dark eyes brimming tears, loosened tresses, pale
fingers clenched on his sleeve,—
Rose up on the shimmering skyline to banish
sleep's craved reprieve.
Day waned with his indecision, while he lounged
at the 'M. & O.'
Until gray-blue hills in the distance and green-
blue waters below
Grew one in the azure twilight; till the Love-star's
carcanet
Gleamed clear on the hushed horizon where the
blent blue velvets met;
And out from the darkling leafage—ghost-harpies
of hawks long-slain—
Slow-flapping their sable pinions, swept the flying-
foxes' chain. . . .
Should he make an end, and forget her, or go back
to Rose's again?

§ IV

Ere he clambered the creaking staircase, he could
hear, to a ragtime's beat,
Sharp clapping of hands, and laughter, and the
scuffle of moving feet.
Men swarmed that evening at Rose's. Already,
the air was foul
With reek of their smoke. As he entered, a drunk-
ard flung him a scowl.
'A boy, a stranger, was playing. They had rolled
back the dusty rugs,
'And were dancing one-steps and two-steps and
tangos and bunny-hugs—
Clare with them. But what of Julie? 'It was over-
early for trade,
Yet with house so full, could it be that——'
The thought stabbed keen as a blade.
"Your vife she go out in de rickshaw. Chust time
for vun leetle smoke,
'And vun visky-tansan, Chimmy." How *die Alte*
leered as she spoke!

"Tid'apa"

How he hated her, and her "Chimmy," her leering,
trafficking face,
And the silly songs, and the music, and Clare, and
the whole damn place:
It was tawdry—to-night he knew it: the unclean
daubs on the wall;
Yon full-fed man in the corner, wine-ripe for a
kiss or a brawl;
The reek, and the reeling couples: 'Good God,
how he hated it all!
This was Julie's life.' . . . 'Was he barmy, a
youngster, fresh from his school?'
'Your chippy was always your chippy.' He
cursed himself for a fool.
A pert face peeped from the chickstrings; and a
pleased glance smiled to his own.
But ere he could rise to claim her, as the wild dog
leaps for the bone,
Or the goshawk swoops on the partridge when the
huddled cheepers rise,
The wine-ripe man in the corner had spotted his
tender prize,
Pounced, grappled, but scarcely held her: fists
doubled, eyes murder-red,
"*Mine,* mine for to-night," flared Jimmy. And
the man saw death there—and fled.

"Tid'apa"

He felt, as his arms went round her, how the young
breasts fluttered and fell.
"My car is waiting."
"Mais, Madame?"
"Die Alte can go to Hell."

§ V

With a sputter, the engines started; the gears
clicked home; and the car
Crawled out from the crowded streetways where
the passion-shambles are:
Crawled out, through the jostling rickshaws,
through the soiled, seethed heart of the town,
Where signs gleamed gold in the flarelights, and
the faces, yellow and brown,
Grinned void in the glare and vanished: crawled
free, took speed and shot on:
Purred out from dazzle to darkness; till the last
light-flicker was gone,
Till they were alone with the fireflies, and the soft
night gloom, and the trees,
And the white road swirling past them to the rush
of the upland breeze:
Alone, with his arms about her, and her tired head
drooped on his breast,
As a child, held close by her father, droops play-
time-weary to rest.

"Tid'apà"

And the car purred out past the palm-trees to a dim, green jungle-plain. . . .
Warm woodlands and wax-white blossoms, dew-kissed of the evening rain,
Breathed incense, whispering to them, as they strolled to the culvert-bridge.
Blue-dark against star-strown turquoise, rose the ramparts of Lallong Ridge;
And high o'er those frowned embrazures, blank-burnishèd, silver-bright,
Trailed clouds and paled star-beams to guard her, sailed the waxing orb of the night.
Green-dark to the rampart-bases, save where, like a wild beast's eye,
One red light glowered and glimmered in the shadow-tracery,
Stretched jungle. Leaves, palm-fronds rustled; and the beat of a native drum
Throbbed bass to the marsh frog's treble, and the shrilled cicada-hum.
But the woman was utterly lonely, and she yearned for the light, bright ways,
For the glitter, the glare, and the glamour of lost Parisian days;
For the work-room chaff, and the chatter, and the *timbre* of her mother-tongue,

For the crowds and the known, home faces. It is
evil work to be young,
To be young, and already broken:—they fracture
where true steels bend,
Your weaker, less-tempered alloys. And the man
seemed almost a friend. . . .
A friend! Were there *friends,* in Lallong? Lust,
passion, hate, she had known;
Not friendship, sympathy. . Coward. . She must
fight her battles alone,
Nor whimper for useless allies. . Yet, could she
but voice it, her pain. .
Why not? He was kind, and a stranger. . She
would never see him again!

It was old, the story she told him, as old as the
horse-leech breed,—
The tale of the lover who promised; the lover,
helped in his need
With money and more than money; the lover
whose lips were a lie;
And the choice of selling her body or watching
the starved babe die.
"But it did die, poor mite. I was heartbroken,
crazy. The shops were slack,

No hat-hands wanted, no dress-hands—Poiret would have taken me back
In a month, two months. . And my parents? I couldn't face mother; she knew
Of my savings, would ask, cross-question. . But what are my troubles to you?
I'm very mean to be crying when you've taken me out like this,
And been ever so good. Do forgive me. Let's laugh, and forget it, and kiss."
Was it love that woke in you, Jimmy? or pity? or just the desire
(Just peacock-decency, Jimmy?) of picking a rose from the mire?
"How long have I been with *die Alte?* Why, it seems like a century.
How long? Three—four—six weeks to-morrow. Six weeks, and it's killing me!
I can't sleep. Such a heat, and no punkahs. All night, I can feel my heart
Throb, throbbing away my life-blood." Speech choked her.
A bullock-cart
Creaked past them, out of the shadows—dark beasts against moon-bright road,

"Tid'apa"

Lit lanterns a-swing from the palm-tilt, tired
driver asleep on his goad.
"Do you ask what brought me to Lallong? What
lures us all to the East,
You men, and us others, but money? It doesn't
pay to be *triste,*
And they didn't want me, in Paris. One night, at
the Bar Palmyre,
I met a woman, a Yankee. She had been in the
East—not here,
But in China. Such tales, she told me, of the easy
life she had led.
And the prices! One worked for a season, and
came back, dowered, to be wed.
O Mon Dieu, how I wish I were married. I might
have been married, once:
But I didn't love, and I wouldn't. Not love!
Sacré nom, what a dunce! . .
I booked my passage next morning. . They were
all so nice on the ship,
Doctor, and purser, and captain. I shall never
forget it, that trip;
Port Said with the Arabs coaling, and Aden, so
barren, so sad,
And Colombo, dear green Colombo. . I wasn't
meant to be bad,

But life isn't simple—for women. . Then, here:
we stopped for the day;
So I landed; hired me a rickshaw. *Madame* in-
duced me to stay.
She was up at her window, watching, as we drove
through Cinnabar Street;
She beckoned; we stopped; and I entered. She
gave me to drink and to eat;
She offered me board and lodging, and half of all
I could earn—
So I fetched my trunks from the steamer . . . and
now, I shall never return.
There, that's my poor little story: and it's no use
crying, no use;
For I've nothing on earth to console me—not even
one good excuse."
Charged silence: shy schoolgirl-kisses—just a
quiver of pleading lips
That are so, so weary of passion: and, bright as
the rain-drop drips
From the frangipanni blossom at the turn of our
changeless year,
Pearl-bright under purple eyelids the unshed dew
of a tear.
Vain gods of unbiassed judgment, that we worship
when noon-day's light

Falls pale on your court-room altars,—shall you
order Malaya's night?
He had lived as a man lives, taken all that which
a man may take
From the yielding trees in the garden; and jeered
at the baffled snake.
Could such common fruit be forbidden? The
thought-train sputtered, and died.
Was it only the one frail sister who wept to-night
at his side,
Or the myriad hopeless others, man's hard-eyed
victims of lust—
Ensnared souls bartered for passion, spoiled bodies
swapped for a crust—
Who raised limp hands to implore him? . . . Or
was this the finger of fate;
Could it be that here was *the woman,* predestined,
his dreamed-of mate?
Tid'apa—the kid was a white girl, alone, in a
brown man's land:
It was up to him, as a white man, to lend her a
helping hand.
"Stop crying, and listen, Julie. If a fellow gave
you the chance
Of getting away from Lallong and starting, afresh,
in France,

Would you take it, Julie? And could you?"
"Would I take it? You are a man,
Yet you know what our life means at Rose's, the horror of it, the ban
Between us and your sneering *memsahibs,* the risks we run, and the mask
We must wear for each drunkard's pleasure. All this you know. And you ask
Would I take the chance if I got it!"
"Yes; but could you? How would you live,
Over there, on your own, in Paris? Let's say that I were to give. . . ."
"You? Give?"
"Yes, give you the money."
Incredulous, wide-eyed, mute;
As a lean cur, thrashed from a puppy by some loutish master-brute,
Will wince to a stranger's petting; she heard—but belief was numb
With fear, with the wounds, and the heartache of a youth-long martyrdom.
"I meant what I said. Are you willing?" He sensed her grasp it, and thrill.
Dark head jerked free from his shoulder: remote and suspicion-chill,

Those veiled orbs probed him in judgment, weighed, wavered; and kindled afresh
With the spark of a hope long-clinkered. Vain hope—for the leper flesh
Of the harlot may not be cleanséd—and she knew it vain; yet the high,
Clean joy of it surged and stammered through the banter of her reply:
"You, you're mad. . . ."
"I'm in deadly earnest, I swear to you. Yes or No?
You must give me your answer, Julie. The money's up. Will you go?"
Hands locked on her lap, brows crinkled and tense to the stress of her thought,
Begged maiden you might have deemed her, but never one of the bought—
Begged maiden with pleading lover. No drum throbbed now. Not a flower,
Not a leaf, not a palm-frond rustled. Long since, had the one red glower
Gone black in the jungle-shadows. Etched sepias and silver-grays,
Hushed, breezeless, the spent plain languished, a-dream in the pale moonrays:
Lulled, even the marsh-frog music and the loud cicada-shrill.

"Tid'apa"

All nature seemed waiting, silent, on the voice of a
woman's will.
"Ah, mais non, mais non. Tu es gentil. But this;
this wouldn't be right."
"Then you won't. Why not?"
"Don't be angry. Don't spoil it, my wonder-night!
You, and the peace you have given, Ridge, jungle,
the moon on the plain,
White road, and white bridge where we rested—
our bridge, shall we see it again?—
Let them all be sweet to remember."
"And will nothing alter your mind?"
"No. Nothing!"
"You give no reasons. ."
"Please, dear—you've been ever so kind,
And I'm grateful, you know I'm grateful—don't
ask me again! It's so late.
Will you drive me home by the shore-road. *J'adore
ça.* Rest—and the great,
Deep hush of the cool sea-spaces. ."
Child-limbs,—that were once so fleet,
As you tripped down the work-room stair-case,
skirts flying, eager, to meet
The lover who waited nightly,—you are tired, you
can scarcely crawl
As far as those gleaming car-lights! . . . Does He
watch when these sparrows fall?

§ VI

Have you pined on some world-end foreshore
when the sea-lanes call you home? . . .
Dulled sapphire, moonstone and gold-stone, in a
faint fringe-setting of foam,
Pearl-white 'gainst the darkling lustre at the black-
pearl plinths of the capes,
The bay gleamed jewelled to the skyline. Mast-
high o'er the shadow-shapes
Of the shadow-ships at anchor, poised brilliants,
the riding lights. . . .
Safe ships of a dream! whither sailing?
As the uncaged homer flights,
The swift, winged woman-spirit shook free, flashed
pinion, and flew
To the call of the pleasure-city. It is there, just
there where the blue
Black, flawless, shimmering sky-vault, star-span-
gled, fire-opaline,
Dips sheer to her prison sea-rim. She can see it.
Glad arc-lamps shine

On the washed, gray glass of its roadways; she can
hear the clop of the hooves,
And the purr of the *taxi-autos:* she is one with the
crowd that moves,
Refluent, laughter-loving, through the nights that
are almost days,
Down the mile-long tree-girt boulevards. Night
ebbs to the chill dawn-haze,—
Yet she does not flinch from the daylight, nor fear
for the unclean thing,—
She is young; he loves her; *c'est Paris;* new lilac
purples to Spring;
They have only this instant parted; waked swal-
lows twitter and fly,
As she leans from her creepered casement to wave
him a last good-bye. . . .
Had the man no share in her vision? Had he not
yearned with the ache
Of the days we have put behind us, self-exile we
dare not break?
"Go back, while the way's yet open." Hands
touched her, the home-spell broke;
The dream-scene flickered and vanished. Her lorn
soul shuddered; awoke.
"Go back."

"Don't tempt me!" she whispered. (Oh, the nightmare æons ahead!)
"Yet you loathe it, this life of . ."
"Loathe it? I would ten times rather be dead.
But to take your money, deprive *you* of little things that you want
So that *I* can. . . ."
"What nonsense, Julie!"
"No, I just can't take it, I can't."
"But . ."
"It isn't as if you were rich, dear; *die Alte* told me, she knows.
And I'm such a fool about money. . That's why I'm here, I suppose. .
It was only the other Sunday, Clare had to settle my fee
With a client who . . . Christ Almighty, is there *no* shame left in me?"
Star-shine, and shadow, and sea-shine—man's world, beyond all belief
Exquisite! . . Man's own tortures, despair unending, the grief
Of one sobless woman-atom, racked, conscience-stricken, adrift!
"You *must* take this money, Julie. We'll call it a loan, not a gift—

A loan to be paid at your leisure."
The full home-vision was gone,
But her gaze still lingered seaward where the beckoning mastlights shone,
And her soul still fluttered for freedom.
"The money is mine to lend,
Though *Madame* does think me a pauper. To borrow, once, from a friend—
Is that such an awful crime, child?"
"You will trust me, knowing me bad—
A prostitute?"
"Trust you? Always! If you only guessed just how glad
It would make me to know I had helped you. When I think of my own career,
Of the chances I've had—yes—and wasted; and of you with no chance. . . . Oh, my dear,
Don't be foolish; life isn't just money. . . ."
He could scarcely hear it, her low
"As long as I live, I shall bless you. You have my promise. I'll go."

§ VII

And what is the end of my story? Midsummer? the long straight street
Of some French provincial township, green-shuttered 'gainst noonday's heat?
And a stranger, an English stranger? and a *gamin* pointing the way
To the hat-shop of Mam's'lle Julie in the Rue Quatorze Juillet?
And a cry of *"C'est toi donc, Jimmy,"* from a girl in a plain, print dress,
Who has fought her battle, and conquered, and waited in faithfulness,
For the man that can scarce believe her the pale, frail woman he knew?
And my lovers at last united in their city of dreams-come-true? . . .
. . . But our dreams come true so seldom—to the drifting souls and the weak,
Never!
What *does* it matter?

"Tid'apa"

Let us hide this thing from our sleek,
Incurious marrying-women. Let us feed them
some half-proved tale
Of an Army Officer's daughter, trapped, bound,
and offered for sale.
Then let them read in our news-rags (*real* pimps,
that pander to cash!)
How we stamped out a phantom traffic with our
threats of a phantom lash.
We are stern, we are moral, and righteous, and
. . . skilful at saving our face
With cruelty-clauses, and health-lies, and this
'safety-valve of the race'—
Our Clares and our tortured Julies. 'They are
daughters of Ishmael;
'They are hardened, forsaken of Heaven.' Is there
any torment in Hell,
That *hardens?* Are virgins 'hardened?' Ere we
gave them the Judas-kiss,
These were virgins we starved or made love us.
We have crucified them for this! . . .
Tid'apa, it's only a story.

On a labouring, creaking ship,
As she stumbles from Guardafui through the
cross-wise roll and the dip

"Tid'apa"

Of the South monsoon's tail-fury; in the hospital-cabin, abaft,
Propped patient and weary doctor. Caged fan-blades shrill, as they waft
The damp, hot, sea-staled airgusts to the man who must fight each breath.
He has hoisted on livid cheekbones the grim, blue Peter of death.
Ice drips from those bandaged temples. Twitched fingers fumble and grope,
Smoke-brown, on the wrinkled sheeting. There is neither solace nor hope
Nor peace in this lime-washed death-trap. Loud bottles jar in the rack,
Tilt, clink as she rolls to leeward, right, clink as she lurches back,
Tilt, clink again as she pitches. The bunk-springs jiggle and grate.
A door-catch raps on the woodwork. From a strained expansion-plate,
Groans answer to wave-thud's tremor on the sodden hatchways below.
Cramp-crouched on his rocking camp-chair, tired-eyed in the bed-lamp's glow,—
Two days and two nights has he vigiled—the doctor dozes and blinks.

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"Tid'apa"

'How long can the heart-valves stand it? his system's rotten with drinks:
And *diplococcus pneumoniæ. . . .*'
A sudden tremor! 'A start!
Bolt upright, eyes staring, arms rigid, slack blued lips trembling apart,
The patient struggles for utterance.
"Ah Wong, Ah Wong, what time train? . . .
Blue sketch-plans—one of them's missing—not I, Sir Edward. . . . Rain, rain,
And the rain's all blood, Julie's life-blood—I must leave Lallong to-night—
You'll see to her, won't you, padre?—I'll post the cash when you write. . . .
James Sanders—that's from the parson—my name's not Sanders, you know,
It's . . . Curse her, she *won't*—won't chuck it—she promised, promised to go—
My Julie, still there, in that hell-shop. . . . White rabbits—the pit's all slime—
No ropes—they're climbing and climbing, but the pitwalls slide as they climb—
Down, down, down—look, bodies, twitching—black shapes, black shapes in the flame—
The snakes, the snakes! . . ."
Gasping silence. Arms crumble. Tottering frame

"Tid'apa"

Rocks; sways; recovers; collapses. "You will bless
—you promise me. Lies! . . ."
"No hope when they've once gone under."
Death glazes those staring eyes.

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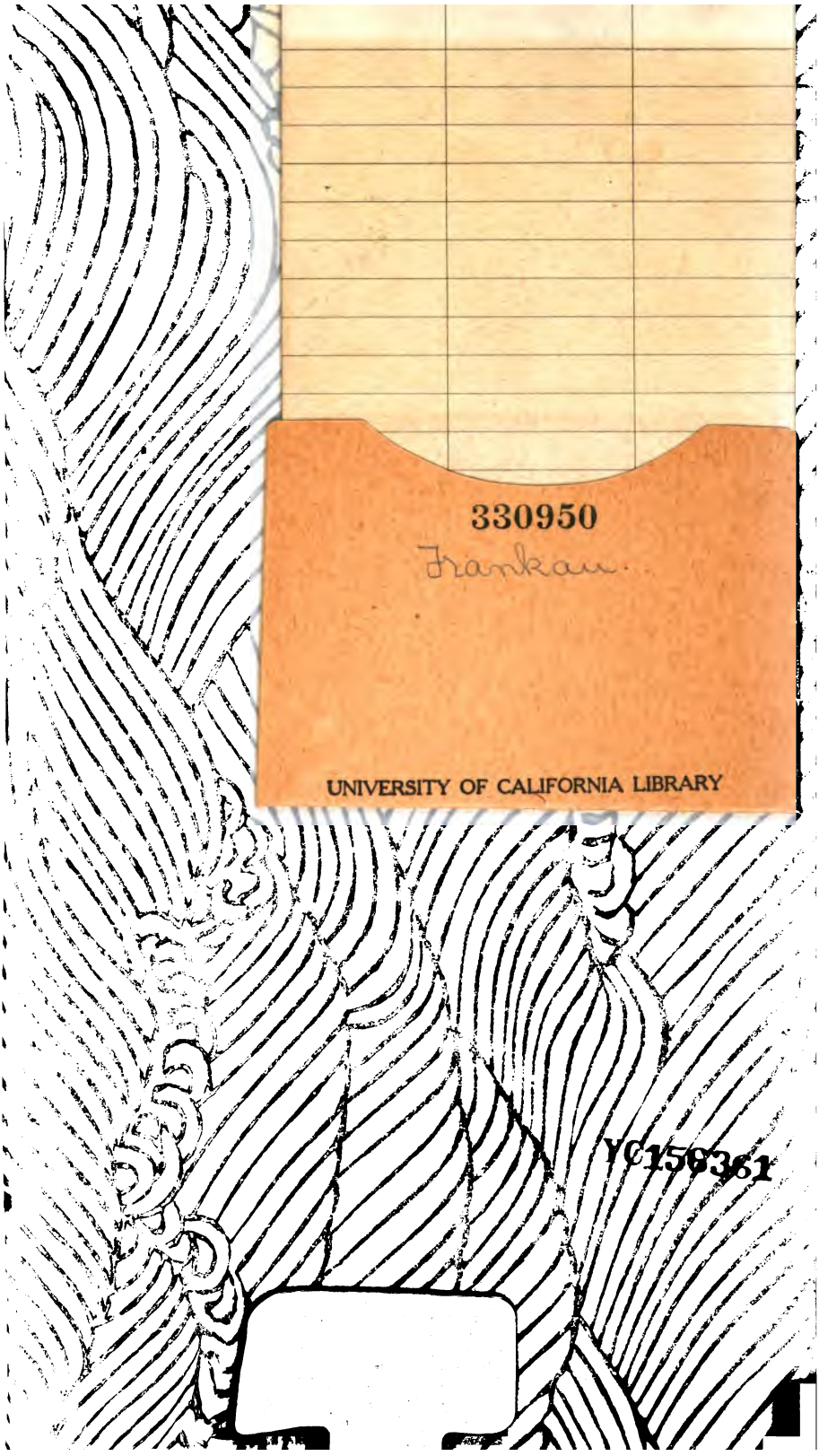
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